

My name is Thressa Johnson, and I've been teaching Spanish-English dual immersion preschool in South Minneapolis for seven years, plus an additional year in Mexico. It was never my intention to become a teacher: I studied English Literature and Psychology, and thought I would become a journalist or work in publishing. When I graduated from Hamline University, I wanted to take some time to give back to the St. Paul community, so I signed up for a year of service as a literacy tutor with AmeriCorps. After a few weeks working with kindergarteners in Linwood Monroe Arts Plus Elementary, I knew I had been wrong: I was meant to be a teacher of tiny humans. When I finished my year with AmeriCorps, I moved to Minneapolis and Joyce Preschool, where I worked as an assistant teacher while going back to school for a Masters in Early Childhood Education from Concordia University. Eventually I moved into a lead teaching position, and grew in my role as an educator: I learned to love not only my work in the classroom with budding bilinguals, but also teaching families how to be parents of preschoolers, preparing both the kids and the adults for their futures in the Minneapolis education system. This year, I moved from that small private preschool into Minneapolis Public Schools, where I work as a High Five teacher at Green Central Escuela Bilingue.

Despite many years in the profession, this is the first role I've had that requires a teaching license. I'm currently on a Tier 2 license, which has limited renewals, and working with an MPS mentor to find the best route into a Tier 3 license. Even with years of teaching experience and a Masters degree in the subject, moving to Tier 3 will be hard. Going back to school for an undergrad degree would mean student teaching that would take me out of my preschool classroom and the work I do best; alternative pathways currently don't exist for preK licensure, and I've been warned about the intense amount of work that would go into preparing for licensure via portfolio. I want to focus my time and energy on my students, which is proving challenging while trying to move into a tier that will allow me to stay in the profession permanently.

I say all of this as a white woman born in the United States; many of the very talented teachers that I learned from and whom I now call my colleagues have even greater struggles to achieve, maintain, and progress in their licensure due to greater barriers for people of color, being from countries other than the United States, and/or not speaking English as a first language. I'm lucky, and I know that, and, even so, I'm having a hard time balancing the endless work I do for my students with my own professional progress. Making the tiered licensure system even less accessible will absolutely remove and prevent amazing teacher from doing the work they believe in for Minnesota students.

Thank you for your consideration.

Thressa Johnson
High Five Teacher
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MPS